

# Start Your Success Plan Now



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Do you have a planning process to improve your company, increase business or be more efficient next year? If you don't, develop one. How much and how well you plan this fall will definitely impact next year's profitability and business performance.

Contract renewal time provides an opportunity to really investigate clients' concerns and find out what's on their minds. Should you approach their concerns head-on or prepare your renewal process as in past years? This is your first challenge, or should I say opportunity.

The renewal period sets the tone for how much business you'll do next year and at what margin. Examine your renewals account by account and determine if you're getting all the business or sharing services with a competitor.

## **In your clients' shoes**

The economy is dictating how businesses make decisions concerning operating expenses, and your services are an operating expense on your clients' financial statements. Put yourself in their position; in fact, you are in their position if you're looking for ways to reduce expenses.

Schedule a preliminary meeting with each customer and listen for any concerns; then you can develop your renewal proposal based on what you've learned. Acknowledge the challenging times and let them know you want to find ways to improve their property without significantly increasing their costs.

Is this a case of giving more and getting the same or less? Not really. Actually, you're increasing the chances of successfully renewing and creating a partnership that opens the door to increase your services and, thus, revenue.

"Because the challenges we face are different with the tough economy, there's more to plan," says Chris Davitt, president of Ruppert Landscape,

Laytonsville, Md. "Our planning process includes analyzing our strengths and our challenges, and then brainstorming solutions that overcome the challenges and build on our strengths.

"We meet and plan more when challenges are greater, such as in a tough market. Naturally in a down market, sales are going to be a challenge. Therefore, considerably more energy needs to be focused in that direction."

Davitt urges owners to consider a variety of alternatives such as:

- Should they expand their market geographically?
- Should they expand their service offerings?
- Should they increase their sales staff or invest in sales tools like marketing materials and websites?
- The more options you consider when trying to meet a customer's needs, the better chance you have of renewing the contract or gaining the sale, says Davitt.

## **Improve your processes**

Tom Morin, Morin's Landscaping, Hollis, N.H., wouldn't think of heading into a new year without some serious planning.

"At Morin's, the planning ahead for (next year) that we are focusing on involves just about every aspect of our business," says Morin. "However, most of our focus continues to be on improving processes and capturing all possible productivity advantages."

Morin's pleased with "the revenue side" of his company, but is convinced he can, and must, continue to improve efficiency.

"With the cost of doing business increasing at a much faster and greater rate than we can raise our prices, there's no room for waste," says Morin. "We want to position ourselves to continue to do great work at competitive prices while maintaining our profitability.

"We have recently reconfigured our yard and dispatch areas to improve the timeliness of our mobilization processes, procured several fuel-saving enclosed vehicles for the many associated benefits, and will continue to seek and implement as many means of becoming more efficient as we possibly can," he adds.

## **Embrace technology**

Don't overlook the business management and marketing tools that technology has provided the industry the past 10 to 15 years. Let clients know you're the expert in these areas, as well as landscape services. New technology can keep your people in touch with clients and track business without the redundancy of touches and internally reproduced communications. This increases efficiency, and efficiency means getting more done with less time, cost and effort. This allows you to compete on price while still offering superior customer service.

Larry Dorsey, president of Dorsey Services in Monticello, Ga., has been using Real Green System software successfully for some time. "The software manages my jobs, scheduling, routing including GPS, marketing, mobile tracking and on-site invoicing for my lawn care company," says Dorsey. "It manages my business so I can concentrate on growing the business."